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A-ONE #1201                                                01/01/10


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->From the Editor's Keyboard                "Saying it like it is!"
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Happy New Year to all - welcome to 2010!  Our 12th year!  Amazing!  The
first issue of A-ONE hit the streets on March 5th, 1999!  And that was
after I don't remember how many years working with Ralph on STReport. I
do know that it's been a LONG time!  It's been fun, I have to admit.
While I don't use any of my Atari computers these days, for numerous
reasons - 90% related to malfunctioning hardware! - I do remember, with
fondness, the enjoyment I felt using those computers.

Joe is correct, I never envisioned us lasting this long - I have thought
about it over the years.  Every once in awhile, I ask myself: "Is this the
last year we'll do this?"  The primary focus for Joe and I was to provide
a medium to continue to bring Atari-related news and information to what
can best be described as a fragmented userbase.  We're everywhere, but
there wasn't a centralized mechanism to supply Atari users with information
any longer.  We took the challenge, and A-ONE was born.

But, being a realist to some extent, I knew that we were in for an uphill
battle.  Why?  Atari was gone.  We may not have wanted to accept it many
years ago, but we knew it to be true.  What new information were we going
to be able to provide?  Would users even be interested?  Well, we're
entering another year, and so far, no one has told us to stop.

So, with all of the years under our belt, I want to start the new year off
like I have for many years in the past - thanking you all for being
faithful readers and supporters.  People still send or point me to stories
that they feel the rest of our readership might enjoy; and I appreciate
that!  For the people behind the scenes, I appreciate your continued (and
unsung) support.

How many more years?  I have no idea.  No predictions, no promises - we'll
take it one issue at a time and see where it leads us!

I hope that the new years brings us all some hope, and that this year will
be better than the last.

Until next time...



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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and so has
another year. For what it's worth, Dana was wrong; There was no turkey
for Christmas day. We had lasagna. The turkey will be THIS weekend...

Also of note, this issue starts off our 12th year of A-ONE Magazine. I
don't know if Dana ever envisioned us lasting this long, but I can tell
you honestly that I never gave it much thought. I'd used Atari computers
for long enough that I wanted to support the community that had made me
feel so at home. I've got so many fond memories of so many people. So many
shows, so many discussions, so many arguments, so many jokes and so many
'projects' and shareware programs. Yeah, those were the days.

Anyway, yeah, I had/have a lot of fun with my Atari computers. They were
marvels of their day, hobbled, in the end, by the very things that made
them both affordable and initially powerful... a closed design and
technically less sophisticated/complicated boards and parts. Those
self-same parts, the ones that allowed Atari to sell us a powerful
computer for a low price, are also what kept Atari from upgrading
capabilities by more than a small margin without losing compatibility.
Yes, The 520 STf was a watershed moment in the computing world. It was
Mac-like, but it was affordable. It was a game machine, a business
machine, a home machine and a graphics machine. Everyone was excited about
it. One magazine called it the "Jack-intosh" in deference to Jack Tramiel.

But as time went on, other computer platforms grew. The things that made
them more expensive; open architecture, connectors for things like
graphics and audio cards, expandable memory, built-in hard drives, newer
and faster CPUs... they all enabled those other systems to grow while the
poor ST line struggled to give even a meager upgrade without sacrificing
compatibility.

For the first few years of "the fall", Atari was able to retain users by
simply dropping the price of existing computers. Sure, a good deal became
even better, but it was still the same machine. That was counteracted by
some of the amazing developers we had... the CodeHeads, Double Click,
Gribnif, GFA, FaSTech, and many more that I can't recall right at the
moment... people with ideas and skills that still amaze and befuddle
me... THEY kept the platform alive for longer than the manufacturer
did... at least for those of us still around. Even today, I can't help
but smile when I think of the likes of John and Charles of CodeHead, Mike
of DoubleClick, Jim of FaSTech, Sheldon his crew in NC, Dan and Rick and
Trisha at Gribnif... so many good memories... and the people... users
just like me... that I've met along the way, Ralph and Dana and Fred and
Myles and Gregg and Dan and Bob and Terry and dozens of others... many of
whom I still converse with. All good people, all good friends.

So we, Dana and I, are looking forward, into our 12th year, and we wonder
what this year will bring, hoping, as no doubt you are, that the coming
year is better than the last. I don't know of too many people who'd done
well this year, at least professionally. Let's look at is as a...
national opportunity for character growth.

So Happy New Year everyone! Here's hoping the coming year brings you
health, wealth and happiness... in whichever order you need them. [grin]

And, of course, I'm going to renew my plea that you think about picking
up an extra can or box or bag or bottle of something to drop off at the
local shelter or soup kitchen or place of worship. Just do it. Just grab
a can of something, yeah it can be something small, and either drop it
off somewhere it'll do a little bit of good or put it in a box in the
corner of your kitchen and wait a couple of weeks for things to build up.
Take the kids shopping with you. Let them pick something to donate. Make
them a part of it. Do it together. And when you've got a little bit of
stuff to turn in, take the kids with you and make them part of the whole
process. What have you got to lose? A couple of minutes in front of the
television or a round of Wii bowling? C'mon. Do a little bit of good.
Teach your kids and they'll teach you.

This is the first week of the new year. Start it off right. You don't
have to change the world. As a matter of fact, I'll let you in on a
little secret... you WON'T change the world. But maybe you can help a
little piece of it. And in addition to helping someone else, you could be
building up valuable karma points. [grin] And you feel better if you've
got some sort of resolution for the new year too, right? Well give this
one a shot. Hell, you probably WON'T keep it up all year long, but who
knows? You just might... we all... just might.

Hang in there, and tune in again next week, same time, same station, and
be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING



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->In This Week's Gaming Section  - Alien Breed Evolution!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News  -  The Latest Gaming News!
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            Alien Breed Evolution Brings Back Classic Amiga Game


It may not push the genre forward in any strong directions, but Alien
Breed Evolution remakes a classic top-down experience and adds online
co-op. The mechanics are solid, the pace is measured, and the graphics
are strong. What else do you need for $10?

Alien Breed is a game that some remember with great enthusiasm, while
others respond with blank stares when the title is brought up. A hit on the

Amiga,  the top-down title was a little bit Gauntlet, a little bit Doom, and a little bit Aliens. The update is out now on the Xbox Live Arcade for 800 points ($10), and it's coming to both the PC and the PlayStation Network in 2010.

Without having played the original, I received a gentle mocking for that shortcoming by Team 17 itself at an early GDC where I was able to play an early version of the game; this is one I'm going to have to judge on its own merits.

Title    Alien Breed Evolution
Developer        Team 17
Publisher        Team 17
Price    800 points, or $10
Platform         Xbox 360 (reviewed), PlayStation 3, PC (Upcoming)

The top-down graphics, powered by the Unreal Engine 3, are solid and detailed. You can spin your view around using the left and right bumpers when playing by yourself, and that's a big help when trying to find passage ways and doors that might have been obscured in the standard view. That power is taken away when playing in co-op, however, as both players need to stay on the same screen.

The story is told via comic book panels between each of the five chapters, although all you need to know is one analog stick moves your character, and the other aims your weapon. You shoot all the aliens until they stop moving. You search lockers and bodies, and you use computer terminals to move the game forward. It really is that simple, and you're going to have a good time unless you expect a step forward in the run-and-gun, dual-analog shooter genre. This is a genre game for those who think grabbing a flamethrower is a very exciting thing.

By the way, grabbing the flamethrower is a very exciting thing.

My only complaint is the constant search mechanic that slows down gameplay. Instead of instantly knowing what's on a dead body, you have to hold down the interact button for a few seconds before being told if there's anything of worth to pick up. The same with lockers. It slows down the flow of the game unnecessarily, and while it adds tension to the experience, it seems to be pulling the game in a direction that's rarely explored. Each chapter is filled with baddies, but you'll also be looking around the levels for ways to fix every mechanical thing you find, since everything is broken, keeping you from moving forward.

As a co-op game, this is a good time with solid graphics, familiar mechanics, and the name of a cult favorite for added buzz. Jack up the difficulty to Elite if you're in the mood for a more measured and frightening gameplay experience. There may not be many surprises here, but killing everything that moves during an online co-op game remains a good way to kill an afternoon.


        Verdict: Buy




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Curtain Falling on 'Digital Decade'


While it got off to a rocky start with the overhyped Y2K bug and dotcom
bubble, the era dubbed the "Digital Decade" by Microsoft's Bill Gates has
turned out to be a dizzying period of innovation.

"It's been an amazingly vibrant decade for the Internet and for digital
things in general," said John Abell, New York bureau chief of Wired
magazine, which has chronicled the technological leaps and bounds of the
past 10 years.

"People simply don't exist in a non-digital world at all," Abell told
AFP. "Even grandmothers and Luddites all have tools and devices - even
if they don't realize they're using them - which connect them to a
digital world."

David Pogue, personal technology columnist for The New York Times,
points to Apple's iPod, introduced in 2001, as among the most
influential devices of the decade.

"It really revolutionized the way music is distributed and marketed,"
said Pogue, who also casts a vote for the Flip pocket camcorder from
Pure Digital Technologies.

"In two years it has taken over one-third of the camcorder market and
has killed the sales of tape camcorders," Pogue told AFP.

Pogue also gives a nod to the GPS navigational unit "which changes the
way we drive and also has environmental considerations because millions
of people spend less time driving around lost."

Touchscreen smartphones such as Apple's iPhone featuring thousands of
applications are also high on Pogue's list.

"It's become a tiny pocket computer in a size and shape that no
computer's ever been before - and mobile and connected to the Internet
all the time," said Pogue. "That's a revolutionary set of circumstances."

What's more, he added, "It's only two years old. The iPhone came out two
years ago.

"Imagine what the iPhone and the Android phones and the Palm phones are
going to look like in five years? They're going to be smaller, thinner,
much better battery life, many more features, much faster."

"Right now we're looking at the Stone Age of these phones," Pogue said.
"We think they're modern but they're not."

Another groundbreaking device high on the lists of technology analysts
is Amazon's Kindle electronic reader, which made its appearance in 2007
and has spawned a host of rivals jostling for a share of the digital
book market.

The past decade has, of course, also seen seismic shifts in the Web with the explosive growth of social networking sites, wireless connectivity and the rise of Internet-based cloud computing.

Web search and advertising giant Google has become "central to our lives," said Wired's Abell, branching out into "everything you can think of, from mail to documents to the telephone."

In the late 1990s, Pogue said, "creating a webpage took skill, talent, special software -- it was still only for the geeks."

The Internet has become accessible to all in the years since, giving birth to sites such as Wikipedia in 2001, MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005 and Twitter in 2006.

"The beauty of Web 2.0 websites is that it makes it very easy," said Pogue. "Anybody can immediately just type, just type to present their point of view without having any special talent except having an opinion.

"What it does that's really amazing is it connects people who have similar interests, even very narrow interests, who would never meet each other," he said. "They would never be able to connect any other way."

Much of what has come to pass over the past 10 years was presaged by Gates when he gazed into a crystal ball in an October 2001 essay titled "Moving Into the Digital Decade."

"Wherever you are, you'll have the power to control who can contact you or access your information to live your life as openly or as privately as you wish," Gates wrote.

As for what the next decade holds, Pogue is not going there. "Anyone who tries to predict the future of technology usually looks like an idiot," he said.

Unless you're Bill Gates.


2009: The Year of Twitter and Facebook


Twitter, fueled by smartphones and online bursts of 140 characters, soared to lofty heights over the past year while Facebook eclipsed MySpace to become the world's leading social network.

"Those are the big winners," said Jason Keath, a North Carolina-based social media consultant and founder of SocialFresh.com, an organizer of social media conferences. "Facebook more or less tripled their size this year."

"Twitter grew immensely," added Keath. "I think there were somewhere around maybe two to four million users at the beginning of the year. Now there are near 40 million."

With 350 million members, "if Facebook was a country it would be the fourth most populous nation," said Scott Stanzel, a former deputy press secretary to president George W. Bush who has also worked for software giant Microsoft.

"Going back one year ago I don't think people would have thought Twitter would have had the influence it's had," added Stanzel, who now runs Stanzel Communications, a Seattle-based public relations consulting firm that offers social media planning among its services.

"It was gaining popularity but it has really exploded this year and it's done so in a way that's become incredibly pervasive," he said.

Twitter has reportedly spurned takeover offers worth hundreds of millions of dollars from Google and Facebook, and its influence as a communications and news-breaking tool has been validated in a number of ways over the past year.

In June, the State Department asked Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance on the service because it was being used by protestors angered by the results of Iran's disputed presidential election.

More recently, Google and Microsoft began integrating Twitter messages into their respective search engines, a new feature described as real-time search.

Rampant adoption of smartphones has much to do with Twitter's growth, according to Jack Levin, co-founder and chief executive of ImageShack, an online media hosting company which runs yfrog.com, a service for sharing images and video on Twitter.

"The explosion of smartphones in the United States and many other countries has led to the success and ease of communication between people and Twitter is certainly in the middle of that," Levin said.

"People obviously want to communicate and Twitter is really a communications platform," he said of the service which allows users to pepper one another with messages of 140 characters or less and provide links to the Web.

"It's a hybrid between instant messenger and email," Levin said.

Levin's yfrog.com is one of the thousands of applications created for Twitter by outside software developers credited with fueling the popularity of the microblogging service.

Facebook, which started the trend of opening up to outside creators of fun mini-programs, was also quick to realize the appeal of being able to connect from anywhere at any time.

"The thing they've done and MySpace didn't do is they've really expanded the scope of their network past the initial site," Keath said. "Facebook Connect is a big piece of that, where you can take your Facebook account and log in from other places."

Facebook and Twitter are popular because essentially they "provide real value to people in their personal and work lives," according to Stanzel.

"You can keep up with hundreds if not thousands just by having a Facebook account or by being active on Twitter," he said.

Stanzel also credited social media tools with "redefining the way in which companies or politicians relate to their consumers or constituents."

"Companies or politicians who have taken to Facebook or Twitter or

YouTube are building more of a permanent relationship with their constituents or with their customers because they're engaged in a conversation," he said.

Keath predicted Twitter's growth is "going to slow," saying it is inconceivable the San Francisco-based firm could match this year's meteoric surge in user numbers.

Twitter needs to be wary of spammers "putting out garbage, bad information, trying to direct message everyone in the entire service, porn links and things like that," Keath added. "That would cause people to restrict their networks a little more."

Stanzel warned that if Twitter "starts becoming overrun with advertising or becomes too complicated they might see their growth slow down or even reverse."

Keath suspects Twitter, which has yet to unveil a plan for making money, will seek over the next year to become "more of a marketing tool."

"I think there will be a lot of emphasis on providing more value to businesses and commerce in general," he said.

As for Facebook, Keath said it "looks highly likely that they're going to launch a payment portal, a payment tool.

"There's debate over whether there would be high adoption of giving Facebook your credit card information," he said. "But if they do that they're not only going to have your social network but your commerce too.

"And then they've pretty much locked in most of your activity online."


New Versions of Firefox Browser Delayed


Mozilla is pushing back deadlines for new versions of Firefox, calculating that taking a little more time to deliver new software will be worth the risk.

Unlike in years past, when Firefox was the only serious, free alternative to Microsoft's Internet Explorer, the browser landscape is especially crowded these days, and browsers that fall too far behind the upgrade race risk losing substantial market share.

In the past year, Google has released Chrome for Windows and beta versions for Mac and Linux; Apple has been aggressively promoting Safari; Microsoft has been putting some new energy into Internet Explorer; and Opera has been working on building new, speedy JavaScript engines.

The next version of Firefox, version 3.6, was slated for a 2009 release, but now that won't happen until at least the first quarter of 2010. And plans for the major 4.0 release have been pushed back until the end of 2010 at the earliest, and more likely the first quarter of 2011.

That delay could be good news for Microsoft, says Charles King, principal analyst with Pund-IT. Recent numbers show Firefox 3.5 with a larger percentage of users than either Internet Explorer 7 or 8, but the trends also show a relatively rapid transition to Microsoft's latest

browser due to market adoption of Windows 7.

"With the delay of the next version of Firefox, Microsoft has a window to take back some market share," King said. "A lot will depend on how well Microsoft gets the word out about IE 8 - how different and better it is than IE 7 and the current Firefox offering."

One of the big additions in 3.6 is the Personas plug-in, which will allow users to easily customize the appearance of the browser. Personalization is something that's popular with end users, although corporations may also be interested in putting company logos in front of employees. Improvements that are more likely to warm the cockles of an IT manager's heart: improved launch times and better security.

Down the road, Firefox should get even faster and easier to use. Mozilla has targeted version 3.7 to start up on Windows 25 percent faster and to incorporate Jetpack, an improved interface for plug-ins that makes them easier to write, install and upgrade. On a lower level, 3.7 is expected to incorporate the first phase of work on Electrolysis, which will improve stability by isolating different processes into separate compartments.

In 3.7, plug-ins will be moved to a process separate from the main browser. That means problems with Flash won't crash the whole browser, a welcome improvement for many users. Another improvement is called Weave, a plug-in that will synchronize bookmarks, passwords, plug-ins and open tabs across different Firefox windows.

In Firefox 4.0, users will see major interface changes as Firefox does away with the old-fashioned menu bar in favor of some sort of pop-down menu. Mozilla designer Stephen Horlander blogged that the current thinking is an "App Button" similar to the approach taken by Microsoft in its native Windows 7 apps.


Rumored Apple Tablet Overshadows Consumer Show


Apple is planning to make a major product announcement Jan. 26, and many analysts are betting it's a touchscreen, handheld computer that looks something like an iPhone. Indeed, the speculation surrounding the Apple tablet is growing - and it's sending Apple's stock up.

Investment analysts are getting into the speculation. In a Wednesday research note, Macquarie analyst Phil Cusick put his thoughts about the rumored tablet on paper, estimating the device will sell for about $800 and drive another five percent increase in Apple's profits in 2010. That would mean Apple selling between three million and five million tablets over the course of next year.

"As beautiful as an Apple tablet may be, the functionality will be driven or limited by the wireless connectivity," Cusick wrote. Apple would need to ink deals with wireless carriers to make the tablet a market success with $559 million in profits in its debut year.

The secretive Apple isn't responding to the rumors, which are typical for late December. As Interpret Vice President Michael Gartenberg sees it, there's too much odds calculating going on around the rumored device. It's binary, he said. Either Apple has a product or it doesn't.

But the speculation fascinates him.

"There are two things that strike me. First, without an announcement, without confirming a product, without any idea of what the feature set could be or what it would do, Apple has captured more mindshare than competitors with already announced and/or shipping products," Gartenberg said.

Second, competitors in the tablet space that are planning to announce new products at the Consumer Electronics Show next week, he said, have the uncomfortable issue of a looming Apple presence that may or may not materialize. So even if Apple doesn't have a tablet, the company is impacting the market.

Also noteworthy is how much hype a rumored Apple tablet is getting just a week before CES. With so many new electronics toys and gadgets making their national debut next week, much of the technology world is focusing its attention on a product that doesn't yet exist, at least not publicly.

"It's one thing when Apple was at Macworld and the Steve Jobs keynote tended to overshadow CES on some years. It's another thing when Apple isn't doing Macworld and there is no Steve Jobs keynote," Gartenberg said. "On the basis of what we like to call the digital unicorn, or fantasies of devices, Apple has already overshadowed most of what's going on at CES next week."

Gartenberg's conclusion: If there is an Apple device, competitors in the space will face formidable competition just to capture attention in the market. If Apple does announce a tablet, he said, all eyes will be on Apple to see if it can do something other players in the tablet space have tried and failed to do.


Google Loses Claim to Groovle Domain Name


Google's complaint that the domain name groovle.com is confusingly similar to its own is without foundation, an ICANN-approved arbitration body has ruled.

Google filed its complaint with the National Arbitration Forum, one of the bodies approved by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) for resolving disagreements under its Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy.

In its complaint against 207 Media, filed Nov. 6, Google claimed that the disputed groovle.com domain name was "nearly identical or confusingly similar" to its own, differing in only two letters from google.com.

That argument didn't sway the panel of three judges appointed by the Forum to hear the case: they found that adding an R and trading a G for a V gave an entirely different sense to the domain name, that of "groove" or "groovy".

The panel declined to examine Google's other claims that 207 Media has no rights or legitimate interests in the groovle.com domain name, and that the domain name was registered and used in bad faith.

"Since the panel found that ... the disputed domain name is not

confusingly similar to the mark, the panel declines to analyze the other two elements of the policy. ... Because the complainant must prove all three elements under the policy, the complainant's failure to prove one of the elements makes further inquiry into the remaining element unnecessary," the panel found in its Dec. 24 ruling.

The decision means that Canadian web development and marketing company 207 Media can continue to use the domain name groovle.com.

The day before the National Arbitration Forum ruled on the 207 Media complaint, it ordered BuzzNews Network of Thailand to hand control of the domain name googlebuzz.com to Google, after ruling that it was confusingly similar to Google's brand, that BuzzNews had demonstrated no legitimate interest in the name, and that the company's use of the domain to generate revenue from click-through advertising was evidence of bad faith.

The forum has now ruled on 64 complaints brought by Google, finding in the search giant's favor in all but two of them. The other case that went against Google concerned the domain name froogles.com. In that case the panel also found that the domain name was not confusingly similar, but then went on to examine the evidence for legitimate interest and bad faith use, rejecting Google's claims on those counts too.


Good Guys Bring Down the Mega-D Botnet


For two years as a researcher with security company FireEye, Atif Mushtaq worked to keep Mega-D bot malware from infecting clients' networks. In the process, he learned how its controllers operated it. Last June, he began publishing his findings online. In November, he suddenly switched from defense to offense. And Mega-D - a powerful, resilient botnet that had forced 250,000 PCs to do its bidding - went down.

Mushtaq and two FireEye colleagues went after Mega-D's command infrastructure. A botnet's first wave of attack uses e-mail attachments, Web-based offensives, and other distribution methods to infect huge numbers of PCs with malicious bot programs.

The bots receive marching orders from online command and control (C&C) servers, but those servers are the botnet's Achilles' heel: Isolate them, and the undirected bots will sit idle. Mega-D's controllers used a far-flung array of C&C servers, however, and every bot in its army had been assigned a list of additional destinations to try if it couldn't reach its primary command server. So taking down Mega-D would require a carefully coordinated attack.

Mushtaq's team first contacted Internet service providers that unwittingly hosted Mega-D control servers; his research showed that most of the servers were based in the United States, with one in Turkey and another in Israel.

The FireEye group received positive responses except from the overseas ISPs. The domestic C&C servers went down.

Next, Mushtaq and company contacted domain-name registrars holding records for the domain names that Mega-D used for its control servers. The registrars collaborated with FireEye to point Mega-D's existing domain

names to no´´where. By cutting off the botnet's pool of domain names, the antibotnet operatives ensured that bots could not reach Mega-D-affiliated servers that the overseas ISPs had declined to take down.

Finally, FireEye and the registrars worked to claim spare domain names that Mega-D's controllers listed in the bots' programming. The controllers intended to register and use one or more of the spare domains if the existing domains went down - so FireEye picked them up and pointed them to "sinkholes" (servers it had set up to sit quietly and log efforts by Mega-D bots to check in for orders). Using those logs, FireEye estimated that the botnet consisted of about 250,000 Mega-D-infected computers.

MessageLabs, a Symantec e-mail security subsidiary, reports that Mega-D had "consistently been in the top 10 spam bots" for the previous year. The botnet's output fluctuated from day to day, but on November 1 Mega-D accounted for 11.8 percent of all spam that MessageLabs saw. Three days later, FireEye's action had reduced Mega-D's market share of Internet spam to less than 0.1 percent, MessageLabs says.

FireEye plans to hand off the anti-Mega-D effort to ShadowServer.org, a volunteer group that will track the IP addresses of infected machines and contact affected ISPs and businesses. Business network or ISP administrators can register for the free notification service.

Mushtaq recognizes that FireEye's successful offensive against Mega-D was just one battle in the war on malware. The criminals behind Mega-D may try to revive their botnet, he says, or they may abandon it and create a new one. But other botnets continue to thrive.

"FireEye did have a major victory," says Joe Stewart, director of malware research with SecureWorks. "The question is, will it have a long-term impact?"

Like FireEye, Stewart's security company protects client networks from botnets and other threats; and like Mushtaq, Stewart has spent years combating criminal enterprises. In 2009, Stewart outlined a proposal to create volunteer groups dedicated to making botnets unprofitable to run. But few security professionals could commit to such a time-consuming volunteer activity.

"It takes time and resources and money to do this day after day," Stewart says. Other, under-the-radar strikes at various botnets and criminal organizations have occurred, he says, but these laudable efforts are "not going to stop the business model of the spammer."

Mushtaq, Stewart, and other security pros agree that federal law enforcement needs to step in with full-time coordination efforts. According to Stewart, regulators haven't begun drawing up serious plans to make that happen, but Mushtaq says that FireEye is sharing its method with domestic and international law enforcement, and he's hopeful.

Until that happens, "we're definitely looking to do this again," Mushtaq says. "We want to show the bad guys that we're not sleeping."


Hacker Pleads Guilty in Massachusetts to Fraud Case


A computer hacker who helped orchestrate the theft of tens of millions of

credit and debit card numbers from major retailers in one of the largest such thefts in U.S. history pleaded guilty Tuesday in the last of three cases brought by federal prosecutors.

Albert Gonzalez, a one-time federal informant from Miami, faces a prison sentence of up to 25 years under the terms of separate plea agreements. He is tentatively scheduled for sentencing in March.

"This is a young kid who did some reckless things and he's going to pay a price for it," said Gonzalez's attorney, Martin Weinberg, after his 28-year-old client calmly answered guilty to charges of conspiracy and wire fraud.

Weinberg said Gonzalez was remorseful and that he would ask two federal judges hearing the cases to sentence Gonzalez to the lower end of the 17- to 25-year sentencing range spelled out in the plea agreements.

Tuesday's plea stemmed from a case that was originally brought by federal prosecutors in New Jersey, but later transferred to Boston. It charged Gonzalez with conspiracy to gain unauthorized access to computer servers at Hannaford Brothers Inc., a Maine-based supermarket chain; convenience store giant 7-Eleven Inc.; Heartland Payment Systems Inc., a New Jersey-based processor of credit and debit cards; and two unnamed companies.

Gonzalez pleaded guilty in September in two other cases that were combined in Boston. Those cases included charges that he hacked into the computers of prominent retailers such as TJX Cos., BJ's Wholesale Club, OfficeMax, BostonMarket, Barnes & Noble and Sports Authority.

Under questioning Tuesday by U.S. District Court Judge Douglas Woodlock, Gonzalez indicated that he had used alcohol and a number of drugs, including marijuana, cocaine and LSD, prior to his arrest in May 2008.

Federal prosecutors have agreed to seek concurrent sentences in the cases, meaning that Gonzalez would serve no more than 25 years in prison. Weinberg, however, said he would argue for a lesser sentence based on factors including the prior drug abuse and a psychiatrist's report that Gonzalez exhibits behavior consistent with Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism.

The defense-commissioned report by Dr. Barry Roth described Gonzalez as an Internet addict with an "idiot-Savant-like genius for computers and information technology," but socially awkward.

"His personal life has been characterized most of all by awkwardness, impairment, troubles connecting to people, with an overarching preference and predilection to machines and technology," Roth wrote.

Authorities said Gonzalez, who said he had worked as a computer security consultant, was the ringleader of a group that targeted large retailers.

In 2003, Gonzalez was arrested for hacking but was not charged because he became an informant, helping the Secret Service find other hackers. But authorities said he continued to use his talents for illegal activities.

Over the next five years, he hacked into the computer systems of retailers even while providing assistance to the government.

He lived lavishly during that time. Authorities said he amassed $2.8 million and bought a Miami condo and a BMW. Under the plea deals, Gonzalez must forfeit more than $2.7 million, plus his condo, car, a Tiffany ring he gave to his girlfriend and Rolex watches he gave to his father and friends.

Before accepting the plea Tuesday, Woodlock heard Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Heymann outline the sophisticated hacking scheme, which also involved an individual identified only as "P.T." and two individuals identified in the indictment as Hacker 1 and Hacker 2. Heymann said they remain fugitives.

Gonzalez identified potential corporate victims by poring through lists of Fortune 500 companies and by going to retail stores to probe for potential vulnerabilities, Heymann said.

"It was foreseeable to defendant Gonzalez that the losses resulting from unauthorized access into the servers of the corporate victims identified in the indictment would exceed $20 million," Heymann said.


## Facebook, Twitter To Face More Sophisticated Attacks


Social networks will face increasingly sophisticated hacker attacks in 2010 but law enforcement is expected to make strides in fighting cybercrime, according to Web security firm McAfee Labs.

"The explosion of applications on Facebook and other services will be an ideal vector for cybercriminals, who will take advantage of friends trusting friends to click links they might otherwise treat cautiously," McAfee said.

In its 2010 Threat Predictions report, McAfee also said it expected to see increased threats to banking security and a rise in the use of "botnets," armies of infected computers used to spread malicious software or malware.

"However, in 2010 we expect to see an increase in the effectiveness of law enforcement to fight back against cybercrime," the Santa Clara, California, computer security firm said in the report released on Tuesday.

McAfee said Adobe products were likely to come under increasing threat next year and the release by Google of its Chrome computer operating system would "create another opportunity for malware writers to prey on users."

"Cybercriminals have long picked on Microsoft products due to their popularity," the report said. "In 2010, we anticipate Adobe software, especially Acrobat Reader and Flash, will take the top spot."

"Based on the current trends, we expect that in 2010 Adobe product exploitation is likely to surpass that of Microsoft Office applications in the number of desktop PCs being attacked," it said.

McAfee said hackers were expected to try to take advantage of the proliferation of URL shortening services such as bit.ly and tinyurl.com.

"These services now appear in all sorts of communications - making it easier than ever to mask the URLs that users are asked to click," it said.

"This trick will play a more predominant role in 2010; it's the perfect avenue to direct users to websites that they would normally be wary about visiting.

"As users' expectations of their Web 2.0 services evolve, we expect to see many rogue services set up with the hidden purpose of capturing credentials and data," McAfee said.

McAfee also said email remained vulnerable.

"Email is increasing in popularity as the preferred method for targeting attacks against individual users, corporations, and government institutions," it said.

"Although such attacks were rare some years ago, we now see many reports of successful assaults, both by criminals and for espionage, in which an email with an attachment or a link to a website is the attack vector," it said.

"During the last six years, botnets have become the biggest thorn in the side of cybersecurity professionals," McAfee added.

"Botnets have become the essential infrastructure used by cybercriminals and nation states for launching nearly every type of cyberattack," it said.

Law enforcement has made some progress in battling botnets.

"As a result of aggressive efforts to take offline these service providers that cater predominantly to the cybercriminal element, as well as of direct targeting of specific botnet control channels, numerous botnet operations have been severely disrupted in recent years," McAfee said.


Tweets, Sexting "Unfriended" in U.S. Banned Word List


If you recently tweeted about how you were chillaxin for the holiday, take note: Fifteen particularly over- or mis-used words and phrases have been declared "shovel-ready" to be "unfriended" by a U.S. university's annual list of terms that deserve to be banned.

After thousands of nominations of words and phrases commonly used in marketing, media, technology and elsewhere, wordsmiths at Lake Superior State University on Thursday issued their 35th annual list of words that they believe should be banned.

Tops on the Michigan university's list of useless phrases was "shovel-ready." The term refers to infrastructure projects that are ready to break ground and was popularly used to describe road, bridge and other construction projects fueled by stimulus funds from the Obama administration.

And speaking of stimulus, that word - which was applied to government spending aimed at boosting the economy - made the over-used category as well, along with an odd assortment of Obama-related constructions such

as Obamacare and Obamanomics.

"We say Obamanough already," the LSSU committee said.

Also ripe for exile is "sexting," shorthand for sexy text messaging, a habit that has caused trouble this year for public figures from politicians to star athletes.

Similarly, list makers showed distaste for tweeting, retweeting and tweetaholics, lingo made popular by users of the popular Twitter networking website. And don't even get them started on the use of friend as a verb, as in: "He made me mad so I unfriended him on Facebook," an Internet social site.

Male acquaintances need to find another word than "bromance" for their friendships, and the combination of "chillin" and "relaxin'" into "chillaxin" was an easy pick for banishment.

Also making the list was "teachable moment."

"This phrase is used to describe everything from potty-training to politics. It's time to vote it out!" said one list contributor.

"Toxic assets," referring to financial instruments that have plunged in value, sickened list makers so much the phrase was added to the list, along with the tiresome and poorly defined "too big to fail" which has often been invoked to describe wobbly U.S. banks.

Similarly, "in these economic times" was deemed overdue for banishment due.

Also making the list - "transparent/transparency," typically used, contributors said, when the situation is anything but transparent.

One list contributor wanted to know if there was an "app," short-hand for "application" popularized by the mobile iPhone's growing array of software tools, for making that annoying word go away.

And rounding out the list - "czar" as in car czar, drug czar, housing czar or banished word czar.

"Purging our language of 'toxic assets' is a 'stimulus' effort that's 'too big to fail,'" said a university spokesman.


Should Employers Ban Facebook at Work?


Should employers ban access to social networking sites like Facebook at work? If you look at the potential security risks alone, the answer would be resounding yes for most enterprises. Aside from the security risk, there's the huge hit that social networking has had on employee productivity. One estimate - from IT consulting company Morse - figures employee use of social-networking sites cost employers $2.25 billion a year in lost productivity.

Yet even with the productivity and security challenges caused by social media, there is no still easy answer to the Facebook ban question. There are, however, plenty of opinions and guidelines that can help your

company make a sound decision around the use of social networking from 9 to 5.

First, it helps to consider how other small businesses as well CIOs at large companies are handling the social-networking phenomenon. More than half of CIOs in a Robert Half Technology survey said their firms don't allow employees to visit social-networking sites for any reason while at work.

"Using social-networking sites may divert employees' attention away from more pressing priorities, so it's understandable that some companies limit access," said Dave Willmer, executive director of Robert Half Technology. "For some professions, however, these sites can be leveraged as effective business tools, which may be why about one in five companies allows their use for work-related purposes."

Public-relations and marketing firms - or PR and marketing divisions within larger enterprises - are among those who believe employees should be able to update their Facebook status at work.

As a PR firm, social media is a way of life for HMA Public Relations. Abbie Fink, vice president and general manager of the firm, said social networking is a critical component of how the company does business. In fact, she added, clients expect the firm to know and understand social media.

"More important to me than whether or not employees are using or viewing social media during work hours is remembering that although they may maintain personal Facebook and Twitter accounts, there is a very fine line between personal and professional in the online space," Fink said. "You need to be careful what you post [keeping in mind that] your boss, your clients, your future boss, your grandmother... may all be on there, too."

At Invesp, an e-commerce conversion optimization company, supervisors have had to ask employees to cut back on Twitter and Facebook usage, even though the company relies heavily on social-media activities to connect to others within the industry, including partners and potential clients.

"We have specified time the social-media activity can take place, and it's always work-related. We'd like our employees to continue building connections with others through their Invesp Twitter handle, and our Invesp Facebook page," said Ayat Shukairy, managing partner at Invesp. "Business hours are dedicated to business only, even if it is a social-media activity. It's not easy to monitor, but since we have not cut our employees off completely and they can engage others through Facebook, even if it's work-related, it has helped tremendously with productivity."

Legal experts have a different perspective about whether companies should ban on-the-job Facebook posts. Some, like Beth Slagle, an attorney with Pittsburgh-based Meyer, Unkovic & Scott, fall back on the standard policy for personal use of corporate resources.

Slagle said employers have the right to prohibit the use of company computers and computer networks for personal use, including for Facebook, other social networking, and personal blogging. Employers can also give their employees social-networking guidelines, including warning that employees will be subject to disciplinary action if they

make negative personal comments about the company's products or services or other employees in a profile or blog.

"Employers should beware that in establishing social-networking guidelines that they comply with all pertinent federal and state laws, including labor and antidiscrimination laws," Slagle said. "Employers should also understand that banning or restricting Facebook may meet with employee resistance, especially from younger employees. For example, a 2009 survey by Deloitte found that 63 percent of 18-to-34-year-old employees say that employers have no business monitoring any of their online activity."

Social media is no different than offering Internet access at work, according to Lyn Mettler, founder of Step Ahead, a company that develops and manages social-media campaigns for clients.

"It's unacceptable for an employee to be online surfing the Net for personal reasons during work hours, and the same holds true for Facebook and Twitter," Mettler said. "However, the Internet can also help us do our jobs, as can some social-networking tools. In fact, Facebook and Twitter can both be great networking tools, and restricting access could limit new business potential."

Steve Balzac, president of 7 Steps Ahead, a Stow, Mass., coaching and consulting company, says if employers are having a problem with Facebook at work, the problem is not Facebook.

"The use of social networking and the ubiquity of smartphones that can access sites such as Facebook means that employers cannot easily ban [social networking] in any case. Instead, employers need to become considerably more skilled at clearly defining goals and metrics for evaluation," Balzac said.

That way, he added, it doesn't matter whether employees are on Facebook or not: they know what is expected from them, by when, and how they'll be evaluated. If they don't live up to the standards, the employer can take whatever action is deemed appropriate.

"This approach," he said, "removes the conflict over Facebook, lets the employer treat the employees like adults and not children, and gives the employees the power to make their own choices, an important component of motivation."

Dani Johnson, author of the number-one Amazon best-seller, Grooming the Next Generation for Success, responds to the Facebook banning question with a series of questions of her own: Does social networking equal employees not working? Is social networking the same thing as having a personal conversation? Is it the same as talking on the phone with a friend about non-work-related issues? Is it the same as making personal plans on company time?

"Last time I checked, we get paid to work and produce results. Our 'personal' social networking should be done on 'personal' time. Employees can use their two 15-minute breaks as well as their lunch breaks to Facebook, tweet, text and talk," Johnson said. "I will say this on the contrary as well. Those mediums are very powerful for business growth and connecting with people you normally would not. Find out who in your office is the best at social networking and turn them loose to help promote your business."

# U.S. Online Holiday Spending Rose 5 Percent

U.S. online spending rose 5 percent to $27.12 billion from the start of
 November through Christmas Eve even though individuals spent slightly less
than they did last year, according to data released by comScore on
ednesday.

Adjusting for the impact of an additional shopping day between
Thanksgiving and Christmas versus 2008, sales rose only about 3.5
percent, the analytics firm said.

Sales of consumer electronics jumped slightly more than 20 percent and
jewelry and watches were also strong performers after a "very weak"
season a year earlier, comScore Chairman Gian Fulgoni said in a statement.

In 2008, online sales as tracked by comScore fell 3 percent.

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